

Approved For Release : CIA-RDP62-00680R000200190069-2

12 March 1975
CIA/RR G/T 19-20SOVIET PENETRATION INTO NORTH ATLANTIC WATERS

The recent damage to five American-owned trans-Atlantic cables off of Newfoundland, and the boarding of a Soviet fishing trawler by the U.S. Navy in the vicinity of the cable breaks highlights the growing concern of the U.S. Government over increased Soviet "fishing activities" in the North Atlantic.

The cable interruptions, which occurred within a 30-mile area about 180-195 miles east of Cape Bonavista, Newfoundland, on the edge of the continental shelf, led to an immediate alert within the U.S. military establishment. It has been a long-standing assumption that in the event of hostilities the USSR would make an early effort to disrupt cable and radio communications between the United States and its European NATO allies.

There is no doubt but that Soviet trawlers are engaged in bone fide large-scale fishing, but the military and intelligence value of their activities cannot be overlooked. It is estimated that there are currently more than 2,000 Soviet ships -- trawlers, tankers, mother ships, fish factories, reefers, and whale catchers -- in the oceangoing fleet, thus enabling the USSR to expand its fishing activities on a worldwide basis. A number of these ships can be easily converted to military use. Two decades ago, Soviet fishing efforts were limited principally to the Barents Sea area and to normal coastal operations. Since World War II, Soviet and Satellite shipbuilding production has been augmented by purchases from western shipyards -- Finland, Belgium, Great Britain, and particularly, West Germany. Recent reports indicate that the new Soviet Seven Year Plan

Approved For Release : CIA-RDP62-00680R000200190069-2

(1959-1965) puts continued emphasis on ship construction for its rapidly growing fishing fleet.

The importance of the Soviet fishing fleet to the USSR as a source of food should not be underestimated. Fish provides slightly more than two-thirds of the animal protein consumed by the Soviets and provides a valuable export item. During 1977 a record fishing catch of over 3 million tons enabled the Soviet Union to surpass the U.S.

The general pattern of Soviet penetration into global fishing waters has been gradually unfolding during the past several years. In the early 1950's the USSR began expanding its activities by moving into the Iceland-Faroes fishing grounds. Large concentrations of Soviet fishing boats, often numbering as many as 300 to 400, have been observed in the triangle roughly formed by the Jan Mayen Island, Iceland, and the Shetland Islands including the Faroes. This triangular area is never void of Soviet fishermen. Heavy concentrations of the fishing fleet appear in the southern tip during the winter months and gradually work their way northward in the summer. Soviet operations in this area lie astride and protect the strategic route to the Barents Sea. At the same time, the existing Soviet fishing patterns would make a hostile move on their part difficult to detect.

In line with Soviet worldwide fishing expansion -- off the west coast of Africa, the Aleutians, the North Pacific, and in the south central Pacific -- the USSR during the past few years has been engaged in fishing activities in Atlantic waters adjacent to North America. Since 1956, in particular, the Soviet Union has been carrying out extensive fishing operations in the Grand

Banks off Newfoundland and the Flemish Cap areas.* Here, cod, halibut, redfish, and other types are processed, frozen, and prepared aboard the large trawlers until a full load is obtained before returning to the USSR. At least a dozen or more Soviet fishing ships have been observed in the Flemish Cap area on a continuing basis. The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Portugal also operate fishing fleets in the Grand Banks region.

In terms of North American defense, the stretch of the North Atlantic along the sea lines of communication between Newfoundland and Europe is the most sensitive ocean area on the globe. It is for this reason that the Soviet fleet of radar-equipped fishing trawlers cruising regularly off the North American coast in the Grand Banks area presents a continuing problem for U.S.-Canadian continental defenses. Although the Soviets frequent the Grand Banks because it is richly stocked in fish, the large assortment of electronic equipment, including sonic fish-finding gear, carried by the Soviet trawlers seems more than sufficient for modern fishing purposes. Soviet fishing ships frequently have been observed in waters that are considered too deep for fishing. During the recent International Geophysical Year (IGY), Soviet ships contributed to research on the ocean's floor near the coast of Canada. Besides fishing information, this research undoubtedly took the form of collecting data relating to bottom contours, depths, salinity, currents, and water temperature, all of which have a definite application to submarine operations. This has given rise to the speculation that the Soviet

* The Flemish Cap is a small bank located at approximately 45°N, 47°W.

SECRET

fishing fleet is maintaining constant surveillance of U.S. experiments in underwater radar and sonar devices, particularly in the field of anti-submarine warfare. In addition, the Soviets are probably monitoring communications of Atlantic Barrier aircraft and picket ships.

It is significant that the Soviet Union has assigned to its fast-growing fishing fleet the task of obtaining hydrographic and oceanographic data, as well as the collecting of intelligence information. Finally, such activities provide a reserve of well-trained sensor and electronics operators for future military operations.

MAP BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Communication Chart of the World (Sheet 1), No. 2180 A, [n.s.], Hydrographic Office, 1945.
2. North Atlantic Area: International Submarine Cables; [1:17,500,000]; U.S. Army Signal Intelligence Agency, 1957 (C).
3. Hydrographic Diagram: Atlantic Ocean (Sheet 1); [1:6,000,000] Lamont Geological Observatory (Columbia University), 1957.
4. Telegraph Chart: North Atlantic; 1:6,000,000; [British] Hydrographic Department, Admiralty, 1958.
5. World International Submarine Cable Routes; [n.s.]; U.S. Army Signal Intelligence Agency, 1957 (C).

Encl.

Map of Atlantic Area Attached.